

Defenders of Wildlife *EarthJustice * Natural Resources Defense Council * Sierra Club

January 21, 2014

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the our millions of members and supporters, I want to highlight our concerns about a policy rider in the Agriculture Reform, Food, and Jobs Act of 2013 dealing with forest roads that could jeopardize the drinking water supply for millions of Americans. That rider, included in the House bill, would eviscerate present and possible future protections of headwaters by private silviculture activities.

Clean water is a finite resource is increasingly important to preserve and protect, not only for agricultural, industrial, ecological, and recreational uses, but most importantly for safe and healthy human consumption. More than 180 million Americans depend on headwaters from both protected and protected forests for their drinking water. In river systems, water withdrawal for commercial and domestic water use supports the needs of homes, farms, and industries that require a constant supply of clean water. Sediment associated with logging is a well-documented threat to water quality. Across the West, roads are the leading source of sediment from logging activities as the construction and use of logging roads creates a constant source of sediment discharged to nearby rivers and streams.

With the recent spill in West Virginia, Americans are learning the weaknesses in our efforts to protect drinking water sources. In the Washington Post on January 20, 2014, Dr. Debra Davis, a founding member of the U.S. Chemical Safety Board, was quoted on the importance and lack of protection drinking water sources in context of the Charleston, West Virginia spill. She said “It would be farcical were in not so grave. This is a huge threat, in a sense, we all live downstream now.” Today – in the middle of a critical farm bill conference – to dramatically weaken present and future efforts to protect drinking water sources – without benefit of hearings or a national debate for the sole the benefit of forest landowners is fraught with risk and danger to millions of Americans.

Drinking water impacts are not the only negative impacts of these types of amendments. Logging road pollution also harms salmon, trout and other fish by smothering eggs, causing gill damage, burying food sources in mud and silt, and destroying essential habitat. The impacts to economically valuable salmon runs put important commercial and recreational fisheries, as well as the thousands of jobs they now support, at risk.

We urge the Conference to not sacrifice our nation’s ability to protect our critical fresh water assets to placate private interests who would find it profitable to put the environmental costs and risk on others.

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